



Our Guide to Starting Small

Starting Small

You've got the idea and you've got the passion. You've practiced your recipes thousands more times than you thought humanly possible. So it's time to dive in headfirst and give it a go, right? Well who's to say you can't begin by dipping your toe? In this guide we will explore some options when it comes to getting your business idea up and running. Remember, small steps may be the best way forward when you're paving your way into the world of independent food and drink.

Starting your own business is an exciting, but undeniably daunting time. The appeal of being one's own boss is often coupled with the warranted fear of what that actually entails. There is a font of knowledge out there on what to do and what not to do when starting a business but taking that first step can still feel like a gargantuan task.

So how does one navigate these fears? Whilst there is merit to grabbing the bull by the horns and facing these fears head on, there is also something to be said for starting small and learning on the job while the stakes are relatively low. Starting small does not negate your ambitions for your business nor does it reflect a lack of commitment. Instead, it can be a way to dip your toe into the independent hospitality industry, enabling you to gain hands on experience that will guide the trajectory of your businesses' future.

Starting small can be as simple as working on your business part time, doing some pop-ups in existing businesses or limiting the type and frequency

of events you attend. If you are not in a financial position to quit full time employment and have your business as your sole income, then it's time to make the most out of your weekends! Not only does this preserve a stream of reliable and consistent income, it also gives you the chance to test what events work best for you, ready for when (or if) you decide to make a full-time commitment.

Try setting up at your local market one day a week for a month. If that doesn't set your soul on fire, try a local food hall or book a small event to see if that is more your style. In this instance, starting small gives you the flexibility to pick and choose what events work for you and then tailor your offering accordingly.

Alternatively, you could look to offer a delivery service on weeknights, where you could make use of third-party platforms like Deliveroo and Just Eat for example. There's a multitude of ways in which an independent hospitality business can operate, and doing something differently may actually translate to higher interest from customers.

Starting up your own business does not have to mean a considerable financial investment, and there are grants and loans available to help you get some investment through your local authority via government backed schemes. Free application support, as well as mentoring and guiding should your application be successful, can provide security and bolster your confidence that your business is getting the best possible start. Keep an eye out for opportunities and speak to your local authority, LEP and BID or NCASS partner UMi who can provide information on business support and grant schemes.



But don't just take our word for it!

NCASS member Nick, founder of Jamon Jamon and Deluxe Dogs started his first stall whilst also working a day job. *'I wasn't making crazy money in my day job, so [the stall] was a nice supplement to it but I wasn't that bothered by the money. I think I was more enjoying the dopamine hits of engaging with customers and the other traders.'* Those dopamine hits, though initially limited to a few days a week, were enough to show Nick that this was something he loved. 15 years down the line, starting small has yet to limit Nick's ambition and instead allowed him to learn on the job without the financial pressures he may have faced had he quit his day job. As such, when the time came to take the step and commit to his stall full time Nick was more than happy to. *'I was quite happy to go, I didn't need the security of a day job that I didn't want to do anymore.'*

By starting small, Nick was able to gain hands on experience, adapt his menu and create a unique offering. Whilst he would be the first to admit that his focus slowly but surely shifted to his food business rather than his day job, starting small gave him the chance to create a financially sound foundation for his business before committing to it full time.

'I remember sitting down with my old boss and he was talking about how I have to have more time at work and that I was taking the mick and I was thinking dude, I rock up on a Saturday, yeah I break my back working, but that makes me near enough two months salary [in a day].'

For many, starting small creates the perfect environment for a business to flourish. A careful and considered beginning with the financial security of reliable employment, provides the scope to perfect your product, gain hands on experience and mould your business without the same financial pressures of diving in headfirst. This slow but considered start can guide the trajectory of your business within your own measures of success and allows business owners to get to grips with every single aspect of their business; from marketing to P&Ls, finding opportunities and negotiating costs.

Starting small may lead to your business becoming your full-time job and it may not. It may be the precursor to opening several bricks and mortar premises but again, it may not. Through starting small you can better gauge if that is in fact your long-term goal for your business, if you want to let things flow in a different direction. The concept of starting small and staying small reflects the flexibility and freedom that attracts so many to both the sector and the concept of being one's own boss.

At NCASS, we can support you on this journey and help you get everything in place before you even have a name for your business. We have members who have been with us for over 20 years and day in, day out we are here to help you succeed, stay profitable and run your business safely and legally. Every NCASS member has a different story and motivators, however, they all share a common desire to turn what they love most into a business and share this with others. In the words of Mark Lawton from weBBQ4U, 'why not give it a go?'

You can have a chat with us by emailing info@ncass.org.uk or calling our team on 0300 124 6866. New members get access to our start up training day run by in-house experts. As well as this, our [pre-launch checklist](#) and industry guides can provide advice and useful guidance on what to expect when the time comes to dip your toe.



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